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# Find U.S. Agents Spy On Embassies' Cables

By FRANK VAN RIPER

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Washington, July 21 (News Bureau) — For at least five years, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Security agency have routinely monitored commercial cable traffic to and from the United States, including messages between foreign embassies here and their governments around the world.

Such activity, possibly in violation of federal law, was carried on with the tacit approval of personnel of the cable firms involved, informed sources told The News.

Section 605 of the Federal Communications Act makes it a crime, punishable by a year in prison or a \$10,000 fine, or both, for anyone to divulge the "existence or contents" of telegraph and telephone messages.

Spokesmen for the FBI and the National Security Agency would not comment on the report.

## A Daily Check

The interception and inspection of the cable traffic, according to the sources, occurred early each morning as FBI and security agency agents visited cable offices in downtown Washington. With the help of willing telegraph employees, the agents photographed copies of cables that the carriers kept on file for billing.

At one of the carriers, RCA Global Communications Inc., the FBI used its own microfilm machine, which was kept in an RCA basement storage room. The agents' key to the room apparently was supplied by RCA, according to the sources.

## "Wouldn't Want to Say"

Thomas Algie, manager of RCA's Washington operations, would neither confirm nor deny that government agents had been granted access to cable traffic. Asked if he was aware of such activity, Algie replied: "I wouldn't want to say one way or the other . . . I don't think I can talk about that." Algie said he was prohibited by the Federal Communications Act from discussing the matter.

Henry Catucci, vice president of another major carrier, Western Union International, denied that "any government agency"

had asked for or been given access to copies of cable traffic.

"Get a Court Order" Catucci maintained that, "if anybody, the FBI, the President of the United States, or anybody, asks to inspect our cable traffic, we tell them to get a court order first." Catucci added that he knew of no such requests since he joined the company in 1962.

Jack Horner, a spokesman for the third major carrier of international cable traffic, International Telephone & Telegraph, issued a statement quoting an unidentified executive in ITT's New York headquarters. The statement said that ITT "has never had any dealings of this nature with these agencies (the FBI or the National Security Agency)." Horner would not go beyond this statement.

## Policy of Confidentiality

It is the publicly stated policy for the three carriers that the messages they transmit are kept confidential — that the only persons in addition to sender and recipient who read the messages are the telegraph employees

doing the transmission. These employees, according to the companies, are under strict orders not to divulge the contents of cables to third parties.

Nevertheless, it has been learned that at one of the carriers telegraph operators not only turned over cable traffic to the government agents — who usually showed up between 5 and 6 in the morning — but even segregated the foreign embassy traffic so that the agents would not have to wade through transmissions between businesses and their overseas offices and personal messages.

The agents reportedly paid for

the service. The going rate, according to the sources, was \$50 a week for cooperative telegraph employees.

"When the agents walked in the door," said one source, all they had to do was pick up the cables they wanted, microfilm them and hand them back as if nothing happened."

## Two-Man Teams

There were indications that inspection of the cable traffic, particularly embassy traffic, had gone on far longer than five years and, had started in the cold war. The News has confirmed that the practice went back at least five years.

One source was present when the agents, in two-man teams, made their visits.

"I asked them who they were and what did they want. They said, 'It's OK, we're from the FBI and we want the traffic.'"

The source said that one of the men flashed an FBI agent's badge; the other displayed a credential in a black leather holder identifying him as an employee of the National Security Agency.

## The agents report

## Some In Code

The agents reportedly sought all cable traffic involving foreign embassies, whether or not they represented governments friendly to the United States. Some of the cables monitored by

Pakistanis, for example, routinely presented their messages for transmission already scrambled in a five-letter code, according to the sources.

These messages, though unintelligible to a layman, reportedly were microfilmed along with scores of others that were not coded.

## Prime Function

The interest in coded messages may explain the involvement of the National Security Agency in the monitoring operation. Created in the early 1950s, the agency had as a prime function the interception and breaking of the codes of foreign governments.

The FBI security agency operation recalled a similar interception, involving mail to and from Communist-bloc countries, undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency with the knowledge of at least three postmasters general and one attorney general.

The mail project, begun at the height of the cold war as a "valuable intelligence tool" and ended in 1973, was centered at Kennedy Airport, according to the Rockefeller Commission report on CIA activities. A main purpose of the project was to open and photograph mail going to or coming from Communist countries, especially the Soviet Union.